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PERSIANA,
THE
NYMPH OF THE SEA.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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PERSIANA,
THE
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CHAPTER XXI.

False, foolish heart! didst thou not say
That thou wouldst never leave me more?
Behold again 'tis fled away,
Fled as far from me as before!

COWLEY.

AS the spring was advancing when Mrs. Mildmay and her companion arrived in England, she went immediately to her country seat; where, as soon as her return was announced to her friends, among other visitants, a sister of her deceased husband, with her daughter, came to pay their respects.

PERSIANA.

Miss Forster was about three years older than our heroine; her person was pretty; but not content with that moderate appellation, her mother's partiality, the flatteries of her maid, and those of two or three artful men in succession, who supposing her a large fortune had deemed her worthy their pursuit, had induced her to believe herself a finished beauty; and she beheld with no small degree of rancour any woman who was likely to dispute the apple with her, for to be admired and followed by the men was in her estimation the highest female felicity; for this reason she viewed the extreme loveliness of Persiana with uneasiness; she could not help confessing her superior attractions, and envy and malevolence took possession of her heart.

Mrs. Forster conceived an equal dislike to our heroine, though it originated

ted from another cause. Mrs. Mildmay, besides her jointure, which was very large, and which devolved to Mrs. Forster's son, possessed also a very considerable personal fortune entirely at her own disposal; and which, as Miss Mildmay was dead, Mrs. Forster had in her own imagination appropriated entirely to her own daughter: she felt therefore not a little shocked and disappointed on perceiving the degree of favour in which Persiana stood with her sister-in-law, which received a very unpleasant addition on that lady's declaring, that she meant to leave Persiana an independent fortune, and had made a will for that purpose.

Envy and interest were a formidable combination; but the affection of Mrs. Mildmay was evidently so great for

our heroine, and her own conduct was so perfectly faultless, that malice itself could find nothing on which to form a plan: they were therefore obliged to be content in pouring their mutual grievances into each other's bosom in mischievous confidence; and affecting to be as fond of her as Mrs. Mildmay herself, lie perdue for some opportunity to effect her ruin: while Persiana, unsuspecting of their malignant intention, returned their civilities with interest; for though she found nothing in their tempers sympathetic with her own, she was never to be out done in kindness and polite attentions.

Adjoining to the estate of Mrs. Mildmay was that of a nobleman, who by ill fortune on the turf and some other imprudences had found himself constrained to sell it during that lady's residence

residence on the Continent; and Persiana, soon after their return, heard with infinite uneasiness that it had been purchased by the Earl of Normanton, who was expected down every day to take possession of it.

Mrs. Mildmay, in whose bosom our heroine reposed all her disquietudes, endeavoured to reason her out of her fears of their new neighbour by telling her that probably he had long ere this time forgotten her in the arms of another mistress; or was not that the case, she had nothing to apprehend from his attempts, for situated as she now was, he would not dare to gratify his passion by violent methods: he might perhaps tease her with his addresses, which she might accept or reject as she thought proper.

"My dear Madam!" interrupted our heroine, "*accept* them! accept Lord Normanton's addresses!"

"Why yes, my dear girl, you had not *always* an aversion to him you know; you had even consented to a marriage with him."

"I had, and I then thought him amiable; but I have since regarded him as a monster."

"That was because he behaved as a monster to you; but let him repent, let him acquit himself with propriety and honour, my life for it your pristine ideas of him recur."

"Never, Madam. Besides I had not *then* seen the man whose overpowering excellencies, like the noon day sun, makes all these little stars hide their diminished heads."

"Ah!"

“ Ah! Persiana! this romance wears too serious an aspect: forbear, my dear girl, farther to pursue a pleasing dream, and reject the real happiness which presents itself to your acceptance.”

“ Happiness and Lord Normanton are incompatible: nor were it otherwise, is he likely to offer it.”

“ Perhaps not: but there are others. I will not however, my love, pursue the unpleasant theme. Yet as his Lordship is coming so near us, I could wish you to see him with temper.”

“ My soul feels the most invincible repugnance at again beholding him.”

“ Then you shall not, my love: I must, you know, be indispensably detained here two or three weeks, or perhaps longer, after which I meant to have gone to Bath: now the Wheat-

leys are going there in a few days, and suppose you go with them and wait my arrival? Mrs. Forster and her daughter will be with me, so that I shall not be alone; and I do not think it will be possible to escape the sight of this hateful man any other-wise, for he will be visited by all our acquaintance, and we must unavoidably meet him at their houses."

This plan was too agreeable not to meet the concurrence of our heroine; the Wheatleys were spoken to, who accepted this addition to their party with pleasure; for Miss Wheatley, a very amiable girl, was exceedingly fond of Persiana; and whilst they were preparing for the journey, Lord Normanton took possession of his new seat, and our heroine kept herself entirely in the house for fear of meeting him.

The

PERSIANA.

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The day before she was to set out, there was a ball given at a neighbouring Baronet's, to which Mrs. Mildmay and her party were invited; Persiana excused herself, to the no small satisfaction of Miss Forster, whose pleasure would have received a considerable diminution by being so greatly outshone.

On their return that young lady was so loquacious in the description of a handsome young officer who had been particularly attentive to her, and in such raptures with his perfections, that she gave no opportunity for Mrs. Mildmay to tell our heroine what she thought of Lord Normanton, who was present, and of whom Persiana was impatient to learn her opinion: but the first moment they were alone she eagerly enquired it.

“ Why

“ Why, my dear girl,” she replied, “ this interview has considerably humbled me I confess; for I find I must give up all pretensions to that skill in physiognomy I had flattered myself with possessing.”

“ He has a good person.”

“ He has more, my dear; he has the most manly, open, fine countenance I ever saw. So far from looking like the *betray*er of innocence, upon my honour, was I to give way to the sentiments his face inspires, he is the very person in the world I would seek for it's *protector*. Nature certainly intended him for a very different character from that which perhaps a bad example, pernicious advice, or the unchecked controul of passion, has made him assume; and I think by the efforts of reason he has resumed his
original

original character or he could not look as he does."

In short, to confess the truth, Mrs. Mildmay, who had expected to have seen a very different person, was surprised to find not only a very fine figure, but also a man whose conversation and manners were elegant and pleasing. On being informed she was his nearest neighbour, he had addressed her with much politeness on it; and upon finding her as she really was a most agreeable woman, had attached himself so much to her during the evening as neither of them danced, nor had either any violent predilection for cards, that though she endeavoured very much to call up a dislike to him in her heart, by reflecting that this was the man who by the basest treachery had nearly effected the ruin of her

her

her favourite, she discovered that love and hatred are independent of the will, are sensations which are neither excited or repressed by the effort of the understanding, but are the spontaneous productions of the soul, and she found the little vanity she possessed—for though a very good woman she was a woman still, and was not insensible to the attentions of a man of figure and quality, whom the younger part of the company were endeavouring to attract in vain—she found this little lurking vanity so pleasingly gratified by his particular notice, that a rising partiality took possession of her mind, and she did not care to be awakened to his demerits not even by Persiana herself.

To these sensations of her benefactress our heroine was a stranger. “I

own,

own, Madam," said she, "that his person is far from disagreeable, and his manners have the polish of high breeding: had he not been upon the whole pleasing, inconsiderate and young as I was, it would not have been his rank and fortune that could have induced me to marry him. I am glad to hear he has taken a better turn, and I wish he may prove himself worthy the favourable opinion you are inclined to have of him; but I am nevertheless extremely happy in the idea of not seeing him for the present."

In the morning Mrs. Wheatley, her two daughters, and our heroine, sat out early in the coach of the former for Bath, where they arrived in the evening. Persiana had not, since she returned to England, been seen before in public, and her beauty and elegance

elegance attracted general notice: numerous were the enquiries made of Mrs. Wheatley concerning her, to which that lady could only answer, that she was under the protection of a widow of great fortune, to whose large possessions she would probably be heiress.

Beauty and wealth! irresistible attractions! Persiana became the universal magnet, and there was not a libertine lord, or fortune hunting squire, unengaged, but laid their hackneyed hearts at her feet.

In the interim, Mrs. Mildmay was not perfectly at her ease at home; her inclinations and her reason were at a very unpleasant variance; and though she governed her conduct by the dictates of the latter, she found many disquietudes arising from the former.

Lord

Lord Normanton had been her constant visitor from the morning of Persiana's departure; he was, or pretended to be, greatly struck with her pleasing manner; there was a pensiveness in it which, he professed, to *him* was infinitely charming, "for," said he, "*I* also am much inclined to melancholy."

"How soothing!" said he to her one day when they chanced to be alone, "how grateful to the soul to meet with a sympathy of temper! You, Madam, have mourned the loss of the dearest objects of your affection; I also lament, and ever shall, the loss of mine: surely Providence pointed us out to each other! we may weep in melancholy unison: and why may we not be permitted to essay to comfort each other?"

"The

“ The subject, my Lord, will not bear pleasantry.”

“ Nor do I mean it as such. Your good sense will, I am certain, pardon the plainness I am going to use, and I must entreat you to be equally explicit: the romance of life is over with us both; was I to protest that I fell desperately in love the first moment I saw you at Sir Thomas Colville’s, you would despise the childish assertion; but that you struck me as the most agreeable woman I had for a long time seen, I would shoot that man through the head who attempted to contrivert: succeeding interviews more than confirmed the first impression, and assured me that the greatest happiness I can *now* enjoy would be in the sweet society of so mild, so amiable a companion, and determined me to
make

make the attempt. If you can like me, Madam, such as you see me, such as you find me, my fortune unincumbered, my character I trust such as will bear a minute inspection, pain me not by unnecessary delay, but at once declare my happy fate with an explicitness equal to my own, and evince yourself, what I have always thought you, superior to the little arts of your sex. A wild, romantic love, my dear Mrs. Mildmay, is out of the question; we meet on the sober ground of esteem and friendship, a foundation on which I trust we shall rear a more permanent felicity than that which has mere passion for its basis."

This declaration was very far from unpleasing; but the idea of our heroine would obtrude itself like an unwelcome visitant on the recollection

of Mrs. Mildmay, and she involuntarily sighed out—"Persiana."

He started at the name. He was now pale, now red: at last—"Did you know her, Madam?"

"Your conduct in regard to *her*, my Lord." She paused, stammered, afraid to blame, yet wishing to express her dislike of his behaviour, which she would gladly have heard him excuse.

He gazed on her with a degree of wonder. "My *conduct*, Madam! perhaps I might be to blame in some things. But oh! Madam, let us drop the subject." Then taking her hand with an effort to smile—"I hope I have now conquered a passion which has long torn my heart with despair, and as the empire of love has rendered me wretched I flatter myself the reign of esteem will be more propitious."

"My

“ My *esteem*, my Lord, you must be conscious, from all the circumstances of that unhappy affair, you cannot deserve.”

“ I am amazed, Madam!” and he really looked surprised.

“ And can you be amazed at perceiving the natural sensations of a feeling mind?”

“ Is it possible, Madam, that an affair which has rendered me the most wretched of beings should be made an objection to my future happiness?”

“ You will oblige me, my Lord, if you will never renew the subject.”

“ Give me leave, Madam, to state to you the circumstances of that unhappy affair, which must have been misrepresented to you; and if I cannot answer every objection to your satisfaction.

faction, I will acquiesce as well as I can in your negative."

"I am perfectly acquainted with the *whole*, my Lord, and wish not to hear the glosses which wit or ingenuity can put upon it. It is an objection which I never can get over, and I beg I may hear no more upon the subject."

Mrs. Forster entering that moment, prevented his making any other reply than a low bow, which was not the humble bending of acquiescence but that of vexation and offended dignity; it was made with an air which expressed he would ask no more what had been so unreasonably denied; his visits were discontinued, and in about a week she sat out for Bath with the Forsters, where a house had been previously taken for her; in which she

was

was scarcely fixed, and had taken Persiana to her, when she received intelligence that the Duchess of L—— was exceedingly ill, and requested her company for a few days. She went immediately, leaving Persiana to do the honours of her house to her guests, to their no small indignation, who would like to have appropriated to themselves that honour; they however continued the utmost civility to our heroine, watching at the same time for an opportunity for pushing her from the height on which she now stood.

CHAPTER XXII.

Let Emma's hapless case be falsely told
By the rash young or the ill natur'd old;
Let ev'ry tongue it's various censures chuse,
Absolve with coldness, or with spite accuse;
Fair Truth at last her radiant beams will raise,
And Malice vanquish'd, heightens Virtue's praise.
PRIOR.

AS Persiana was sitting one morning in the pump room with Miss Forster and some other young ladies, Captain Thomson entered with a party of gentlemen, and no sooner espied her than he immediately ran up with the utmost familiarity, congratulating himself upon finding her again. "What a dance did you lead me," said he, you

“you little devil, that night I met you at N—’s! and after all I could not discover your hiding place.”

He stopped; for the indignant confusion of our heroine was too conspicuous on her expressive countenance to be overlooked. He now for the first time observed her companions; and knowing some of them, and those to be women of character, with a prodigious prudence in his own estimation, after a few moments of awkward silence, he cried—“I beg your pardon, Madam—I really took you for another lady,” giving her at the same time a look which contradicted his words.

“At least, Sir,” said she, recovering a little her confusion, “you mistook my *character*.”

“ I ask ten thousand pardons,” said he. “ I am very short sighted—I really for the future will never go without glasses—I hope I see you well, Miss Forster? how do you do, Miss Hinchbrook? how are you, Madam?” to another lady.

After some lively chat, in which the ladies seemed desirous of engaging him, and in which Persiana could not sufficiently rally her spirits to join, he left them to join the party with whom he entered.

“ Tell us,” said one of the gentlemen, who happened to be brother to Miss Hinchbrook, “ tell us who is that enchanting girl that sits next my sister? You are of her acquaintance, I perceive.”

“ Faith no,” answered he; “ I thought I had, but I find myself mistaken.”

“ Your

“ Your eyes must be bad, Thomson. 'Tis hardly possible to mistake such a person as her's. There are not two such in the kingdom. Who *could* you take her for?”

“ To confess the truth, a little *fille de joye*, that in a fit of affected coyness ran from me at N—'s a year or two ago, whom I had the pleasure of courting through half the streets at that end of the town.”

“ 'Tis an odd sort of a mistake.”

“ 'Tis so. I am convinced my eyes are grown exceedingly bad.”

This he said in so odd a manner, that the other, who perfectly knew him, plainly saw he was not speaking his sentiments. The lady in question seemed very intimate with his sister, and he determined to know more of her.

Persiana

Persiana had found her spirits so much discomposed, that she told Miss Forster she was very unwell, and would walk home. That young lady had not lost a syllable of what had been said by Thomson, nor was the glance of his eye unobserved; something she saw there was, but was at a loss to guess what.

“ My dear,” she cried, “ you are strangely discomposed at what that mad young fellow said. It will look so comical to go home upon it. He will really think himself in the right.”

“ I care not what he thinks, and I assure you I am too ill to sit.”

“ You shall not go home alone,” said Miss Wheatley, perceiving Miss Forster had no inclination to move; “ you must permit me, Miss Merfille, to walk home with you.”

Persiana

Persiana accepted the civility of this good natured girl, and leaning on her arm departed, revolving with great uneasiness what might be the consequence of this disagreeable recognition, and what it's effects on such an inquisitive mind as Miss Forster's, who, in spite of her little arts of affected kindness, she perceived was, as well as her mother, perfectly alive to any thing which might prove injurious to her character.

When she was gone, Thomson and Hinchbrook approached. "I am afraid," said the first to Miss Forster, "my unpardonable mistake has deprived the pump room of it's chief ornament."

"Why you have strangely alarmed the lady," said she, with a malicious smile; "one would be almost tempted to

to think, by the effect it has on her, that you are *not* mistaken."

"Who is she?" said he, affecting not to hear.

"Upon my honour she is a lady of whose history I am not the least acquainted. My aunt Mildmay picked her up about two or three years ago; she has been abroad with her, and the old lady is so monstrously fond of her, that we are all obliged to bow to the idol."

Thomson now turned the conversation on different topics; and after a little time, walked home with the ladies, parting with them at the door.

Hinchbrook, like many other young men, had very nice ideas of female honour when it concerned his own wife or sister, and was very jealous of that strict decorum in *their* behaviour, of which

which he would exert his utmost efforts to divest any other handsome woman: upon his sister's account therefore he became extremely anxious to know who Persiana in reality was, and importuned Thomson so much, as he walked with him to his lodgings, to inform him, that as they had been long intimate, and Thomson had the firmest reliance on his honour, after they were entered the parlour he shut the door.

“ Now,” said he, “ I will gratify your curiosity, Hinchbrook, and tell you all I know of this girl; for between ourselves it is really the same; one cannot, as you say, be mistaken in such a face as that. About two years and a half ago, I met this individual young lady in the stage from Trenton to London; we took her up at a little inn in a small town on the road.

road. I believe you will allow it was hardly possible to pass two days with so sweet a girl without what is called falling in love with her ; but fool that I was I fancied her as modest as she was beautiful, and, from some circumstances, that her heart was prepossessed in favour of another, which is you know a wonderful preservative of a woman's virtue; I therefore made no attempt towards gaining her favour, but being constrained to leave her at L——, where my regiment was, and where my Colonel had appointed to meet me the next day, yet unwilling entirely to lose sight of her, I dispatched my faithful Harry to find out where she lodged, who returned the next day with such intelligence as amazed me: for she went from the inn in a hackney coach with a man I am *certain* she

she never saw till she entered the stage, and was set down with him at the house of one of those compassionate matrons in high life, where a gentleman or lady who are so unfortunate as to be plagued with a jealous partner may meet a friend in perfect security; I knew her well for—but that is nothing to the purpose—I could scarcely credit the fellow, and the first leisure day flew up to town to reconnoitre myself, when I saw her, with her accommodating hostess, handed with an air of peculiar tenderness into a coach by a person who looked very much like a man of fashion, and I was informed was of quality, but I could not learn his title. But mark the vicissitudes of her fortune: it was not above a week after this, that I was at N—'s with a party drinking
some

some wine; coming down stairs with Charles Freeman, who should I see in the common room but this very girl, with Louisa Careless, whom I think you must know; she seemed to have been fainting: I could not repress my astonishment at the sight of her; and she, I suppose as her situation was but *novelle*, not grown quite callous to shame, seemed amazingly confused at seeing me: her companion proposed a supper, and I was offering my services, when seized with a fit of coyness, with a vast deal of affected indignation she ran into the street, and I followed the course. I rambled half the night after her to no purpose, and was near having lodgings assigned me in the watch house for stopping every woman I met. Well, a very few days after this adventure I found *this*—
taking

taking out a paper—"in the Daily Advertiser, which you will acknowledge is too descriptive of her person to be mistaken for any other, and which, as a curiosity of its kind, I cut out of the paper, and have preserved it carefully in my pocket book; read it;—and now we see her here, under the protection of a woman of fashion and character, noticed by all who are such."

"You must allow me, Thomson," said Hinchbrook, "to just hint to my sister what sort of companion she has chosen."

"Just sufficient then to put her upon her guard; but I depend upon your honour for going no farther: for if she can stand her ground as a woman of character, I would not injure her for the world."

Miss Hinchbrook and Miss Forster had also, before they parted, some conversation on the subject; the former persisted in supposing it *really* a mistake, but the latter, whom envy and interest had rendered extremely quick sighted, would not believe but there was some mystery which she could not penetrate, but vowed she would spare no pains so to do; and on that ground they parted.

Poor Persiana had a very unpleasant dinner; for Miss Forster, with a very sarcastic air, recapitulated Captain Thomson's "droll blunder" to her mother, which if our heroine had laughed at, would have passed off without farther notice; but they both perceived her hurt, and with great good nature, by dwelling on the awkward circum-

circumstance, endeavoured to wound her the more.

Hinchbrook did not dine with his sister; he came home however to dress for the ball, and then took an opportunity of hinting that he thought Miss Merfille an improper acquaintance for her: but finding her really much prepossessed in favour of our heroine, and very little inclined, upon so slight a foundation, to believe ill of her, he was obliged to be more explicit; and at length was drawn, partly to corroborate his advice, and part'y to gratify a curiosity he had powerfully excited, to give her nearly the same history which Thomson had so lately recited, but under the same seal of secrecy it had been communicated to him.

Indignation at having been induced to converse with such a woman on terms of intimacy, more perhaps at having acknowledged the superiority of her beauty and merit, unfitted her for retaining the intelligence as she had so solemnly promised; and she burned just to *whisper* it to Miss Forster; a communication which she thought justice demanded for her friend, whose character might be contaminated by the acquaintance.

They met at the ball, where Persiana did not appear; but Miss Hinchbrook had not there an opportunity of unloading her heart of this burthensome secret; she could only hint she was in possession of such an one, and they agreed the next morning to meet for their mutual gratification.

In

In the morning, before Mrs. Forster's time of rising, Persiana, who could promise herself no pleasure in the party at home, walked out to call upon Miss Wheatley, whom she knew to be as early a riser as herself, and they sallied out together, chatting very chearfully on different subjects, when a gentleman, who had some time observed them, approached.

He bowed; he seemed to wish to address our heroine, yet hesitated as if uncertain of the person. She looked in his face and instantly exclaimed—"Sir George Patterson!" A thousand painful ideas were connected with that name; they crouded in a tumult on her recollection, and she stood pale and silent, uncertain whether his presence portended her good or ill.

He did not let her remain long in doubt. "How happy am I!" said he, "Miss Merfille, that I have at last found you! how many anxious hours have Lady Patterson and myself experienced from the uncertainty of your fate!"

"Lady Patterson, Sir George?"

"Yes, my dear Persiana; she has long acknowledged, long lamented the injustice of *her* conduct, as I have sincerely repented *mine*. She will be in Bath this evening, and I shall have the most exquisite delight in restoring to her the long lost child of her heart: but where have you been, my sweet girl? you look angelically, and fortune, I see, has been more propitious than we feared it would."

"Mine is a long and eventful tale, Sir George; I will gladly recite it to
Lady

Lady Patterson, when I hope she will find I have not been unmindful of her invaluable precepts—and oh! with what rapture shall I find myself restored to her heart!”

“ I am mortified that an indispensable engagement obliges me now to tear myself away; but where do you lodge? I shall most likely bring Lady Patterson to you to-night, for I know she will not be detained a moment.”

Persiana told him where she lived, and they parted; a thousand pleasing ideas counterbalancing the mortification of the preceding day, exhilarated her spirits, gave new brilliance to her eyes, and a richer glow to her cheek.

Thus all irresistible loveliness, she entered a milliner's shop with Miss Wheatley; a handsome coach stood before it; a very beautiful and ele-

gant woman stepped in; the milliner, after putting in several bandboxes, took her leave with one of her most obsequious curtseys, and the coach drove off.

The appearance of this charming woman excited the curiosity of Persiana, and she enquired who she was.

“La, Madam,” said the milliner, “she is Lady Elizabeth, the Duke of Portman’s daughter, and was married last week to the Honourable Mr. Gordus, second son to the Earl of Welbrooke. She is a vast fortune, and was very finely dressed indeed; I was so lucky as to be recommended to her Ladyship, and had the honour of serving her.”

She then proceeded to describe very minutely Lady Elizabeth’s finery; but not one word did our heroine hear;
her

her whole soul was lost in tumults at the agonizing intelligence: her brain seemed in a whirl, her pulse wildly throbbed, a pain seized her heart, and her breath seemed oppressed with an enormous weight; yet she did not faint, and retained just presence of mind sufficient to endeavour to conceal her consternation from those around her, for there were several ladies in the shop, and one gentleman: luckily they were listening so attentively to a history of silver muslins, embroidered crapes, &c. that having thrown herself into a chair, she had leisure a little to recover herself before the description was finished; and Miss Wheatley's business being finished at the same time, she accompanied our heroine to the door of Mrs. Mildmay's house, and there took
her

her leave; and Persiana, running up stairs, locked her chamber door, and throwing herself on the bed, gave a violent lase to the agitations of her soul.

By not going into the parlour, she avoided interrupting the *tete a tete* which was going forward there; for Miss Forster was eagerly listening to Miss Hinchbrook, who, not content with giving her a salutary hint, in the openness of her heart and the ardency of her friendship made her mistress of the whole story, which Miss Forster assured her was perfectly necessary to enable her to develope to her aunt the character of that serpent she had taken to her bosom.

Persiana was really too ill to appear at dinner, and by that means escaped at that time the sarcasms which were prepared

prepared for her by this pair of friends, for they found it impossible to part at this juncture. Fortune now seemed determined to overwhelm her with a flood of calumny; for soon after dinner two gentlemen came in, who were both of the respectable order of petit maitres, one of whom, Mr. Farvel, had paid fervent court to our heroine, and quickly after an old lady made her appearance, who, seating herself, asked Mrs. Forster very abruptly if she knew what sort of a girl she had in the house with her?

“ I am afraid I do too well,” answered she.

“ Then truly you do very ill to introduce her to your acquaintance.”

“ It is my sister Mildmay’s fault; I really cannot help it; I should have
my

my own eyes pulled out if I was to attempt to take the veil from her's."

"And so for fear of offending her, destroy the reputation of your own daughter by appearing with such a creature."

"I hope not."

"It must be so. Her conduct is *flagrant*. Was she not seen with Sir George Patterson this very morning?"

"Sir George Patterson! who is he?"

"Oh ho! you are unacquainted with *this* part of Madam's story then. Lord how things come about! When I was dressing for dinner, I said to my maid, what a sweet young lady is Miss Merfille! She smiled in a very particular manner, and said, yes Ma'am. Why, said I, do you know any thing about her? A little, Ma'am, said she; but she is a great lady now,
and

and it may be wrong to say *what* I know of her. This you must think a little alarmed me, for I am very nice you must know in my acquaintance, for one's character you know may be injured by an improper one. Well, says I, I *insist*, says I, Molly, that you tell me every thing you know about her. Well, Ma'am, said she, if you *do* insist, 'tis my duty to tell; and I am sure I would not disoblige such a good mistress for the world. Fine as she now goes, Ma'am, and like a gentlewoman in the best silks and fatts, I cannot help every now and then saying to myself, laud what luck some people have! for as sure as you are now sitting there, Ma'am, she was no more than a beggar's brat, that 'Squire Tragony picked up in a dirty lane, and he and Madam Tragony took

took compassion on, and brought up with Miss, their own child, and fondled her, and had her learned to work, and dance, and play on the musics: but for all this kindness, Ma'am, she turned out very sadly, for young Madam Tragony, after the old 'Squire's death, married Sir George Patterson; and this Miss Persee, I think they called her, inveigled away his love, and Lady Patterson *her own self* caught them in bed together. There was a sad combustion, Ma'am, to be sure, and so Sir George left his poor wife, and took this wicked woman up to London with him, where I suppose he have kept her ever since, for I will take my bible oath, Ma'am, that I saw them together this blessed morning on the south parade."

This

This story was received with infinite satisfaction by the audience. Miss Forster, who thought all reserve was unnecessary; and with the leave of Miss Hinchbrook, who was entirely of the same way of thinking, unburthened *her* part of the diabolical budget, protesting that the moment her aunt Mildmay set her foot in the house, she should be made acquainted with the whole, who she was sure would turn her immediately out of doors.

“ And pray, Ma’am, give me leave to ask,” said Mr. Farvel, “ has the lady no *other* dependance than on the favour of Mrs. Mildmay !”

“ None in the world, Sir; she has not a shilling of her own.”

“ Then,” said this worthy lover of Persiana, “ I know no reason I should
conceal

conceal what I have heard of this young lady. I was about a fortnight ago in the pump room talking with Doctor Gruel, of D—— a very sensible man upon my word, and one who knows something of every body: well, ladies, I was talking with him, when Miss Merfille came in: there, Doctor, said I, is the pride of Bath, the greatest beauty and the greatest fortune. The Doctor looked at her very attentively and smiled, but said nothing. I thought this was very singular, and said, says I, Doctor, why what is the meaning of all this? I expected you would have broke out in raptures with the lady's beauty, and you only smile upon it: I do I assure you believe her complexion is entirely her own. I dare say it is, said he; but I smiled in recollecting the different seeming circumstances
in

in which I saw this beauty before. I was very urgent to know *where* he saw her: why, said he at last—but I beg it may go no farther, and I promised never to speak of it—I attended this young lady at a little public house in D——, where she was kept by a strolling player, a very personable man indeed, and one that any lady might like: he was afterwards taken up for a highway robbery; and this fine young creature, left to herself, was, if I remember right, but I almost forget, passed home to her own parish. I was surprised, you may be sure, to hear this; but it was none of *my* business, you know, ladies, to divulge the secret; she was very handsome, I was very much in love”—(he sighed)—“and—— but as I now more *clearly* perceive what sort of person she is, I

shall endeavour to tear her from my heart"—and with another deep sigh he concluded his speech.

Every mouth was now opened in the exclamations of offended virtue, and our poor heroine was condemned as the most abandoned of her sex: as she was expected down to tea, a cabal was entered into, and a plan formed for her utter mortification and confusion. Mrs. Wheatley and her two daughters were immediately sent for, as people equally injured with themselves in being introduced into the intimacy of such a — No word that became the mouth of a lady was thought sufficiently emphatic, and therefore a blank was left for the imagination to fill.

When Mrs. Wheatley entered, she was astonished. Borne down by the weight

weight of evidence, she was loth to believe, yet found it impossible to resist such a combination of circumstances, and would have withdrawn when she found their intention was publicly to disgrace the unfortunate object of their censure, but was detained by the laugh of ridicule at what they called her ridiculous tenderness.

But though appearances were so strongly against her, nothing could induce Miss Wheatley one moment to believe Persiana guilty of what was alledged. She knew one part of the charge, which related to Sir George Patterson, was founded in misapprehension, and imagined, by a combination of unfortunate circumstances the other might be the same: at least she was determined to keep her judgment suspended till she saw fuller proof: her

sister was too young to form any judgment at all; but the sweetness of Persiana's manners had procured her an interest in this innocent bosom, and she had her warmest wishes.

Just before the destined victim of malice made her appearance, a middle aged gentleman entered, who was known to Mrs. and Miss Forster. This was the gentleman who was in the milliner's shop when our heroine and Miss Wheatley entered in the morning, but standing on the farther side of it, looking on some laced ruffles, and the ladies engrossing the attention of every one, he stood unnoticed, and had little to do but to observe others.

Persiana, her natural beauties heightened by the agreeable meeting with Sir George Patterson, excited his extreme admiration, and he remarked
with

with astonishment the amazing change which the milliner's news wrought in her expressive countenance. He at first apprehended a fainting fit, and was hastening to her assistance: but remarking at the same time the efforts she made to conceal her disorder, he retired to his place, imagining his officiousness would be disagreeable to her. He saw her depart, languid and drooping, and a sigh of anguish for her distress burst from his bosom—a bosom which was the residence of humanity and compassion.

This gentleman, after paying his compliments to Mrs. and Miss Forster, seemed disappointed at not finding Mrs. Mildmay at home; and after conversing a very short time, not being wonderfully taken with the faces of the assembly (for he was a physiognomist) was

risen up to take his leave, when the door opened, and in swam the lovely object of his morning admiration, and by an involuntary movement he sat down again.

As Persiana was left by her kind patroness mistress of the house, she thought it incumbent on her to perform all the little ceremonies of it; and addressing the company round, took polite notice of every one.

No return was made to her civility by any but the two Miss Wheatleys, for Mrs. Wheatley thought it necessary to preserve a distance till she had cleared herself from the charges against her: no one answered the common enquiries: the women looked over her as it were with an air of contempt, the men with a most impertinent sauciness.

She

She and the gentleman looked almost equally surprised: she took a feat: indignation restored the roses to her cheeks; conscious innocence, and the innate dignity of a noble mind, gave majesty to her air, and spirit to a heart which the cruel intelligence of the morning had almost crushed.

She looked round; *they* knew not how to begin, and remained silent: at last she said—"I know not what spirit is predominant to-day, but surely it is a very uncivil one."

"Do you wish to know?" said Miss Forster, with great pertness.

"I do indeed, Madam."

"Then I will take upon me to tell you, Miss Merfille, or whatever your name may be," said Mrs. Forster. "Tis the spirit of *curiosity* which prevails to-day; and as you never in-

formed us of your *history*, we have been trying to trace it."

"And did it answer the trouble you have taken?" said Persiana, biting her lips.

"Oh wonderfully, as you shall judge."

"No, Madam, you must pardon me; I shall not stay to be insulted. My dear Mrs. Mildmay knows my *whole* story, and to *her* I refer you for a proof or confutation of any thing that you have heard."

"Matchless impudence! You plead guilty then?"

"I plead nothing before your self erected tribunal, which has no right to judge of my actions; and I know no reason why I should endure the insults of ignorance and malignity." She was going; but Miss Wheatley ran
up

up to her—"Do, my dear Miss Merfille," said the amiable girl, "hear their senseless charges; I know you will disprove them."

The mother commanded her silence, and Persiana sat down again: "well, ladies," said she, "to oblige the only friend which I find I have in this assembly I *will* hear what you have to say, and learn what part of my unhappy story you have perverted to the purposes of malice."

"Oh we shall exhibit *many* parts; and beginning, as all histories ought, we will take you at your birth, my fine young lady: when you, a beggar's neglected brat, was picked up by a gentleman in a ditch in a dirty lane: he took you home, educated you with his own daughter, and the grateful requital which you made was
the

the being detected in bed with that daughter's husband. Do you acknowledge this early part of your history true, Miss?"

"Oh wonderfully so," said she, with a disdainful smile.

"Nay, Miss, you cannot deny that he carried you to London, where I suppose he kept you; that he still visits you, and that you were together no longer ago than this very morning."

"I shall not attempt to deny, Madam, that I saw Sir George Patterson, if it is him you mean, this morning, and that I hope to see him this evening."

"Hardened wretch! Well, Miss, your next adventure I believe was going out of a stage coach with a gentleman you had *never seen before* to a house of ill fame, being there kept
by

by a nobleman, whom, after living with some time, you ran away from, and robbed of money and jewels to a considerable amount, which he took care to advertise, with a full description of your person. Is this true, Miss?"

"Something more so than the other."

"You acknowledge the robbery then?"

"I acknowledge there was such an advertisement."

The gentleman, who had remarked the indignant variations of her countenance, now if it was possible redoubled his attention: whilst Mrs. Forster with unabated malice proceeded.

"Well, my young lady, you were afterwards seen in a bagnio with a woman of the town, where you *solicited* a young officer: you were next with

with a company of strollers, and kept by one of them, who was executed for a highway robbery; and that pretty delicate person was consigned to the care of the parish officers to be passed to its own parish."

This was too much for the patience of our heroine: she arose, and uttered an exclamation of distress. "But I *will* have patience," she cried: "have you any thing more to say, Mrs. Forster?"

"Answer these first, Madam."

"I shall answer nothing, Madam, to a company whose preconceived malice comes determined to condemn. To Mrs. Mildmay I refer for a full confutation."

"And think you the world will be influenced by that good but weak woman's unaccountable partiality?
though

though she may be deceived by an artful tale, *previously* calculated to anticipate discoveries such as we have made, the world will look to *facts*, Miss, not the glosses which your *ingenuity* may put upon them. We will take care to announce your real character to it; and then see who will admit into their society the adultress and the thief, the inmate of bagnios, and the associate of highwaymen. No, Miss, you and your Mrs. Mildmay, if she continues to favour you—but that is hardly possible—will be shut out alike.”

Poor Persiana! Intirely overwhelmed, she sat down again in her chair, pale and breathless; whilst every tongue but the Miss Wheatley's and the gentleman's, were employed in invective against her; the young ladies were in
tears,

tears, but the pity of that benevolent man was more active: he arose, and taking her almost lifeless hand—"Will you make no defence, my young lady, against charges such as these?"

"Alas! Sir," she answered, looking in his face with some surprise on perceiving him a stranger, "what would it avail me? you see the malice of my calumniators, and the story which I could tell would be called art and deceit."

"Where people cannot plead in their own defence, they are allowed counsel for that purpose; will you constitute me your's, Madam?"

"I should have a pleasure in so doing, Sir, if I thought it possible to stem this torrent."

"Oh very possible believe me; and I will undertake so to do. Well then,"
said

said he, walking into the middle of the room, and addressing the company, "this young lady constitutes me to plead in her behalf before this august assembly. What say you, my lady president, and you gentlemen and ladies of the jury? am I allowed to act in this official capacity?"

"Certainly, my Lord," said Mrs. Forster; "but your Lordship never undertook an affair which will do you less credit."

"I am of a different way of thinking. I shall, however, undertake to answer but *one* part of the charge, but that in my ideas will sufficiently invalidate all the rest. It is alledged that this young lady accompanied a man, whom she never saw before, out of a stage coach to a house of ill fame: a heavy charge in the ears of female delicacy,

licacy, if granted true. Can you deny it, Madam?"

"I hold the truth too sacred for to do, Sir. I certainly did."

A general laugh of insult ensued: the nobleman looked round him with an air of contempt: "when this effusion of *humanity*," said he, "for the supposed errors of inexperienced youth has subsided, I hope to have the honour of being heard."

Awed by the dignity of his air, they were again silent, and he resumed.

"As this charge is not denied, I can only, in imitation of my brethren of the coif, attempt to *palliate* it. This lady—*how* she came into the stage coach is no part of my business to enquire, because it is not comprehended in your accusation of her conduct—
young, unpractised in the world, her
guileless

guileless heart giving her no warnings of the demons lurking in those of others, met in that coach with the most specious and most artful of men; I am sorry to add, he was a clergyman, for the sake of an order which I highly respect; but to her unsuspecting innocence the lambs cloathing gave double credence to the ravening wolf. This man then, of an order she had been ever taught to revere, not young, wearing the appearance of grave sententious morality, full of invective on the wickedness and deceit of the world—a subject on which he was very able to expatiate—professing a mind tremblingly alive to every sentiment of honour, every feeling of humanity, perceiving in her the marks of deep distress, artfully worms himself into her confidence, and learns that when

she reaches London—a place of which she is entirely ignorant—she has no home to repair to, no one friend to acknowledge or receive her. Can you conceive a more forlorn and distressful situation? This specious villain affects, what an honest man must have deeply felt, the utmost compassion for the unsupported state of a young creature, whose exquisite beauty was so likely to attract the attention of the libertine, and whose innocence rendered her so little able to detect his insidious artifices. To invalidate the few prudential arguments which so young a mind might have suggested against trusting to the prepossessions of a *stranger*, and to hint that in no passions of his own, but in the utmost purity of true and disinterested benevolence, originated his wishes to serve her,

her, he remarks his age, his sacred function, the known excellence of his character: he professes himself her friend and protector; tells her of an amiable female relation of good fortune and irreproachable character, with whom she may with comfort and credit reside till he can provide an establishment for her in some family, which he pledges his honour soon to do. Reflect, ladies, a moment on her distressful situation, on these advantageous offers of disinterested friendship, from an apparent grave and respectable character, and then say, whether you should not have rejoiced at this alleviation of difficulties, whether you should not have embraced them with transport as she did?"

"It is a fine excuse truly!" said the old lady with some impatience:

“ why, Sir, a very slight acquaintance with the world would have informed her that nobody now-a-days offers friendship without some design of serving themselves.”

“ I should have been loth,” he replied, “ to pronounce so *general* a satire on the principles of the age. That virtue, that goodness, that true benevolence, did *really* exist, she was informed by her own feelings, and experience had not yet acquainted her, that though many assumed their likeness, few possessed their reality. She naturally believed what she saw no reason to doubt; and happy in the acquisition of so generous a friend, was introduced by him to a woman as specious as himself; a woman of education and family, but who disgraces both by supporting herself in that affluence,

fluence, of which her imprudent conduct had before deprived her, by making her house privately convenient to the illicit pleasures of others. By them, a young nobleman was introduced to her acquaintance; he becomes enamoured, and seeks by every method to win her affections; her infamous hostess sounds her principles, and finds them those of firm and unyielding virtue; they perceive that unless force is used, there is no other method of winning her than by a semblance of honourable love; this young nobleman, then, courts her for a wife; she accepts him; a day for the marriage is appointed, equipages are bespoke, jewels and cloaths bought, and every preparation in forwardness. Receiving him now as her affianced husband, nothing but a ceremony wanted

to compleat their union, he all fondness and tender blandishment, she all gratitude to a man, who, snatching her from obscurity and distress, lifted her to rank and grandeur, in one of the softest and most unguarded moments of love he sought to anticipate that happiness which a few days were to give him a title to, but found her real and unaffected modesty, her innate virtue, even in that tender and dangerous moment, a sufficient guard; and unwilling as he was to profane a sacred ceremony, he found that he had no other method of luring her to his arms than by a sham performance of it. Every thing was therefore prepared for that purpose, and a fellow dressed in canonicals to officiate as clergyman; when, fortunately for the preservation of innocence, the very day

day before this detestable scheme was to have been executed she overheard a conversation which discovered to her the whole plot, and determined her to fly from it: but ere she could effect her purpose, her noble lover presents her with the jewels, and the money also for her casual expences; and before she could take either from her pocket, before she could provide herself with a single article of dress, an opportunity happily offering she made her escape. *Then* it was the advertisement you have heard of was inserted in the public papers; a plan of the wicked woman's to force the poor unfriended wanderer back into her infernal clutches, a reward of five hundred pounds being offered for her detection, the temptation of which sum it was imagined few people could

resist: but they found themselves mistaken; the money and jewels were returned, but the lady remained undiscovered.

“ Now, ladies, did I not say truly that by answering to *one* of your charges I should invalidate all the rest? for is it possible to imagine that a young woman who could repel a lover in *such* circumstances; who regardless of all the allurements of wealth and grandeur, which she had it in her power of enjoying had she *not* been virtuous, would *voluntarily* return to that extreme, destitute, and melancholy state, from which it was evident she had been taken? was it the *least* likely she should have *previously* been caught in a criminal situation with her patroness's husband, or immediately after *solicited* a young officer, or gone into keeping
with

with a highwayman? It is incompatible with every idea of consistence to believe it *possible*."

"Not if we credit this fine romantic tale," said the old lady pettishly, "which however we are not *obliged* to do."

"Mrs. Forster you know me?" said the gentleman colouring.

"I do, my Lord."

"Then on the honour of a gentleman I do declare, that I had the whole story from the nobleman's *own mouth*; and he recited it to me at an hour when all deceit flies the heart, and truth undoubted sits upon the lips—*the hour of death*."

"Alas, Sir!" exclaimed Persiana, who had been held in speechless wonder at this extraordinary defence of
her

her conduct from a stranger; "is his Lordship dead?"

"He is Madam; and gave me in charge with his latest breath to find you out: but in vain has been my search till this day. In the morning I saw you in a milliner's shop without imagining you was the lady I was in quest of: and I should have remained still in ignorance, had not a desire to pay my devoirs to Mrs. Mildmay, who I was informed was at Bath, led me hither this afternoon, and this good company with such unparalleled *good humour, candour, and ingenuousness*, comprehended your supposed deviations."

The men looked sheepish and silly, the women disappointed: but the old lady appeared very unwilling to give up *her* share of the tale; and when the others attempted some awkward apologies,

logies, mumbled—" Well, well, I did not mean any harm to be sure; I only repeated what was *told* me: but though we *must* believe, I suppose, that she is a very *good* young woman, she may be a *beggar's brat* for all that."

" She may," he answered; " but if you will excuse a low pun, I shall say, that is an offence against *good breeding*, which, as it originates not in herself, ought not to be imputed to her as a *fault*; and," added he, gazing earnestly on her, " how I envy those happy beggars their charming offspring!"

" I cannot on the present occasion but rejoice," cried Persiana, " that this part of their allegations is as false as the rest; and though my parents *are* unknown, there is every probable circumstance to suppose them of rank."

" Your

“ Your parents *unknown*?”

“ Yes Sir; I know them not. But I was not, as that lady asserts, found in a ditch, but was taken from the wreck of a ship in the arms of my unfortunate mother.”

With an exclamation of joy, and clasping wildly his hands together, he cried—“ What is it I hear?”

“ I left a casket behind me at that vile woman’s.”

“ What of that casket?”

“ Which contained the trinkets found on the body of my dear drowned mother. You, Sir, perhaps saw them.”

“ Saw them!—Oh! come to my arms thou most amiable, thou best of girls, for thou art my child!”

“ Your child!”

“ My child! my child! That dear infant I imagined buried with it’s dear
hapless.

hapless mother in the depths of the sea! See, my angelic girl, see the contents of thy precious casket—there are few hours since I possessed them that I have ceased to bathe them with my tears. Oh! they are the inestimable reliques of a dear saint! look! here they are,” added he, eagerly pulling them out and spreading them on the table. This is the portrait of thy father in his days of felicity—see! perhaps grief may have left some traces of resemblance still.”

“ Oh! it is still like! wonderously like!—Oh my father! my blessed father! thou art sent in a propitious hour to be the restorer of my reputation—to be the parent of my happiness as well as my life! teach me to support the rapture—the extatic, the almost

almost painful felicity of this moment."

She had thrown herself into his arms, where he held her in a fervent embrace; she then sunk on her knees to implore his blessing, and the paternal benediction was given her in rapturous enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XXIII.

After long stormes and tempests overblowne,
The sunne at length his joyous face doth cleare,
So when as Fortune all her spight hath showne,
Some blisful houres at last must needes appear.

SPENCER.

WHAT a change was here ! Hogarth ! what a subject for thy pencil, the countenances of the party ! they tried with all their might to look pleased, and for once obey an apostolic precept—" Rejoice with them who do rejoice ;" but their strained features, and the same sort of leers with which Milton's satan beheld the felicity of the first happy pair, betrayed the awkward effort.

As

As awkward were their attempts at apology. Persiana stopped them. "No more, I beseech you, ladies. Appearances were certainly much against me, and you had reason to suppose I *deserved* your censure: yet I will presume to suggest *this* use of the past scene, that when you hitherto sit in judgment on the conduct of a weak and erring sister, that you will reflect appearances *are* fallacious, and hear first what humanity and candour can urge in her defence, ere you consign her to eternal infamy. Yet, oh the inscrutable ways of heaven! that often out of seeming evil produces real good. Had you been *less* severe, *less* scrupulously minute in the investigation of my ill conduct, I had not found such an advocate, I had not discovered a *father*. Yet as there are still many circum-

circumstances which were alledged against me remain unanswered, but by the candid implication of a humane and generous heart, if you will have the patience to hear my very singular story, I trust it's recital will account for the *whole* of my behaviour according to the strictest rules of virtue and honour."

In that moment a servant announced Sir George and Lady Patterfon. "Oh!" she cried, " what a day of blessedness is this! In this happy hour they come to elucidate my tale, and compleat the measure of my joys."

But the agitations of her joy impeded her wishes to fly to meet her early benefactress, and she was obliged to lean for support on the arm of her father when they entered.

Lady Patterson ran eagerly up to her. "Child of my heart!" she cried, "have I once more found thee? Come to my bosom, my dear Persiana!"

"Oh rapture! my more than mother! Am I *really* restored to your love, to your esteem?"

"You are, my dearest child. Forgive the madness of jealousy, the injustice of passion, and say that I am reinstated in thine—say thou forgivest me, Persiana!"

"Forgive you! Oh Madam!—and in what a moment do I see you here! Behold my *father*, Madam, this moment found; and you—you are come to fill my cup of felicity to the brim. See, Sir, my more than mother: she took me, an unknown orphan, torn by the hand of fate
from

from all my natural friends, she took me to her arms, and to her heart: what is it I do not owe to her and her fainted parents? If I possess any merit, if I have evinced any virtues, to her assiduous care, to her precepts, I am indebted for them. You, Madam, will have the goodness to recite to my dear father the story of the shipwreck, and you will I hope justify my conduct from other suspicions which have arisen. Sir George, I entreat your pardon: give me leave to present you to my father."

"Ah Persiana!" said he smiling, "I perceive I am not *cordially* forgiven. But time will I hope evince that I deserve so to be."

All ceremonies gone through, the wild enthusiasm of joy a little subsided,

Persiana repeated her request to Lady Patterson that she would favour the company with her history as far as she was acquainted with it; and with this request her Ladyship readily complied, though the first part involved the father of Persiana in the deepest affliction, by acquainting him with the particulars of the fate of his beloved wife, and the latter part covered with some confusion her husband, who however with great ingenuousness confessed his faults, and did Persiana ample justice.

The story being brought down to the night of her escape, our heroine now took up the thread of narration, and recited her whole eventful tale; but as her father seemed to have been tender of mentioning the name of
that.

that nobleman who had been so near affecting her ruin, she did not for that reason mention it herself, any more than the real one of the handsome stroller, only observing that he was the son of a man of quality; nor did she take any notice of the passion which the merits of that young man had raised in her breast; though when she came to that part of her story where he was connected, a recollection that he was now the husband of another woman heaved her bosom with a sigh, occasioned an internal reflection on the imperfection of all earthly felicity, and perhaps had this salutary effect, that it enabled her to bear the tide of happiness which had so unexpectedly and surprizingly flowed in upon her, with greater equanimity.

“ Now, ladies,” said she, when she had ended her pathetic tale, which had drawn many tears from some eyes, and induced the use of the cambrick handkerchief to all, “ as you told me the spirit of curiosity was prevalent, I have taken some pains for it’s gratification. No apologies,” (for they were again attempting to make some :) “ if you are not angry with me for being innocent and happy, when you seemed to be assured of my guilt and infamy, I cannot feel any resentment to those who have occasioned that investigation by which my innocence is made known, and been the means of discovering my supreme felicity. No; my heart sincerely thanks you; to you I am indebted for unspotted fame, and—oh rapture!—a *father*. I know
not

not how we are prepared Mrs. Forster, but this must be a night of festivity: this good company must sup with us, and I will now speak to the house-keeper."

She rose for that purpose; and as she passed the Miss Wheatleys took a hand of each, and pressed them to her bosom. "I shall ever," said she, "remember the tenderness of those gentle and compassionate hearts."

When she retired, all mouths were opened in her praise; but what was remarkable, those were warmest in her panegyric, who had been the most eager to calumniate. The men—oh! they were in rapture! Her father looked at them, and his eye awed them into silence. It was well for them that he held them in sovereign

G 4 contempt,

contempt, and infinitely below his resentment; for he had not half the generosity of his daughter, and but *assumed* an air of complacence to half the company in complaisance to her, though his ear drank with transport the delightful theme of her praise from all.

She returned, the most lively spirits shining in her fine eyes, good humour dimpling her vermillion cheek; no invidious hint recalled unpleasing remembrances; but by the attentive politeness of her manner, the enlivening sparkle of her wit—that wit whose genuine brilliance needed no butt to display it's brightness, she seemed determined to bring them into humour with themselves; that they, losing all recollection of their *intentional* injury, might

might be induced to look upon her without malevolence; for she well knew "they seldom pardon who have done the wrong."

Just before supper, in the midst of a very animated conversation, Persiana, the life of the company, sitting by her father, whose fondness could scarcely a moment suffer her hand to be separated from his, but he still held one, which he frequently pressed to his lips, the other arm thrown across the back of the chair on which she was sitting, paternal love beaming in his eyes as they wandered over her fine form, the door opened and Mrs. Mildmay entered.

As she entered without noise, she stood some moments unobserved, and contemplated with a degree of astonishment

nishment the singular scene. At length Persiana, turning her eyes that way, saw her; she started up; she flew to her. "My dear Mrs. Mildmay, my generous, second protectress here? This happy evening will bring me all who are dear to my heart! Oh! Madam! you are come in happy time to partake my joy—my extatic, almost insufferable joy!"

But to her great surprise, Mrs. Mildmay did not seem inclined to partake the offered feast; coldly and gravely she disengaged her hand, which Persiana had taken, and seated herself in silence, looking round on the company, some of whom were strangers to her, with an uneasy and inquisitive eye. But Persiana was not easily rebuffed. She took her father's hand, and led him

him towards her. "I am convinced, Madam," said she, "I shall give pleasure to your benevolent heart by presenting this gentleman to you: you know him already, I believe, Madam, but oh! you were unacquainted with the tender relation in which he stands to me." She paused a moment, her eyes cast on his with a look of unutterable pleasure, an encreasing confusion and uneasiness were perceptible in those of Mrs. Mildmay. He is—oh Madam, he is my long lost, newly found *father*."

"Your *father*, child!" she cried, with a look of ineffable delight, I—I—do not understand you—it is *impossible* the *Earl of Normanton* can be your father!"

"The *Earl of Normanton*!" repeated

peated Persiana, casting on him a most inquisitive look.

“ Yes, my love,” said he, replying to the glance, “ *that* is my title, to which I succeeded on the death of your lover, who was my nephew, my elder brother’s son.”

Persiana, no longer at a loss to account for the reserve of Mrs. Mildmay, turned an eye of transport on her, which she met with a deep and animated blush. She no longer declined the devoirs of the *father* of Persiana, but partook largely the general joy, and received with infinite grace Sir George and Lady Patterfon, whom our heroine next presented to her: the mutual felicitations were renewed, and surely the happiness of few parties could surpass that of this.

When

When they separated for the night, which was not till a very late hour, Persiana revolved with transport the incidents of the eventful day: nor was she deficient in pious gratitude to the all gracious protector of innocence, who had so providentially not only saved her from being crushed by the combinations of malevolence, but had rendered the very *means* intended for her *destruction* the *occasion* of *honour* and *happiness* to her: had given her with bountiful profusion in one short hour wealth and title, friends and fame.

One little black spot alone appeared on the horizon of her happiness; "and shall *that*," said she, "obscure the bright sun of my felicity? No: that would be ungrateful to the author of all good. I will tear this passion from
my

my heart." She sighed as she formed the resolution, and laid her head on the pillow with a wish, of which that heart was scarcely conscious, that sleep would bring the loved image to her imagination, with the contemplation of which she was determined not to indulge her waking thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

But happy they! the happiest of their kind!
Whom gentler stars unite, and in one fate
Their hearts, their fortunes, and their beings blend,
Where Friendship full exerts her softest power,
Perfect esteem, enliven'd by desire
Ineffable, and sympathy of soul;
Thought meeting thought, and will preventing
will,
With boundless confidence.

THOMSON.

THE next day was a day of explanation: the Earl of Normanton informed them, that when the little Persiana, the first and only fruit of his marriage with the best and most amiable of women, was near two years old,
a very

a very dear friend of his was taken ill at Lisbon, who expressed so warm a wish to see him that he could not refuse his request, but left his wife and child in England, and went to Portugal; that this friend continued in a very dangerous and lingering way, and would not hear of parting; in his impatience at being separated from those darling objects of his affections, he wrote to have his lady and daughter come over to him, thinking the air of Lisbon might be salutary to the former, who ever since her lying in had been in a very delicate state of health: that they had embarked—the unhappy event of which the company was acquainted with. That receiving from a sailor, who was thrown upon a distant part of the coast, and, as he asserted,

the

the only person who survived, an account of the wreck of all that was precious to him in the world, he continued a long time in such a desponding state, that life was a burthen to him, and that unsettled and wandering, he resided in different parts of the Continent till about a year before his nephew's death, who when he found that event approaching, had sent to his uncle, who happened to be then in town, revealed to him the intended seduction of Miss Melcombe, as she was then called, which laid very heavy on his mind, and entreated him if possible to find her out, and endeavour to make some compensation for the trouble and uneasiness he had given her, and restore to her a little casket which contained some things

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which

which she much valued; but he did not mention any part of her story *antecedent* to her being seen in the stage coach by Bringloe; that soon after his nephew's death, he, the present Earl, in a moment of leisure, indulged a sudden fit of curiosity by opening the casket, and was astonished beyond the power of words to express at discovering it's contents; but so far from indulging in a supposition that either his wife or child could have escaped, he concluded that instead of wearing these her usual ornaments, his lady had in her great care packed them in something, and the sea had thrown them on the coast near which the sailor had told him the shipwreck happened. The sight of them had renewed his dormant grief, and edged his desire

to discover the person who now claimed possession of them.

Lady Patterson then told the means by which she had discovered that Persiana had never been seen by Sir George since her departure, which was, it seems, by a correspondence among the servants: she described her remorse for the consequences of her violence, and her anxiety for the fate of the friendless orphan, and said that she had been induced by it to make such advances to Sir George towards a reconciliation, that they had again met, and had united in every enquiry which it was possible to make, but all without the least traces till the morning of yesterday.

The Earl, who had been before very abundant in his grateful acknow-

H 2

ledgments

ledgments for her early goodness to his daughter, now renewed them with fresh warmth and energy : his effusions of gratitude were also profuse to Mrs. Mildmay, whose hand, as he sat between her and Persiana, he tenderly took. "See, Madam," said he, "how once on a time you and I misconceived each other : mistaking me for my nephew, you reprehended my ill conduct to Persiana; ignorant of the existence of any of that name, I imagined you meant my wife, and that the imprudence of my having desired her to cross the sea with only servants to attend her, had been what you hinted at, for some of her relations had the cruelty to upbraid me for it, and indeed I was very ready to condemn myself, as if the presence of any earthly being

being could have hushed the winds, stemmed the fury of the waves, or borne the ship without being dashed to pieces over the rocks. In that moment, Mrs. Mildmay, you were guilty of injustice, and not only mistook a very honest gentleman for one of a different character, but also *punished* him for the imputed guilt."

"I plead guilty, my Lord."

"I shall, therefore, demand a reparation of the wrong done me, and shall beg leave, the first opportunity we have, to discuss that point."

"Sir!—my Lord!"

Persiana leaned across her father, and looking smilingly in Mrs. Mildmay's blushing face: "from my dear Mrs. Mildmay's love for her Persiana," said she, "originated, my Lord, the

H 3 injustice

injustice of which you complain, and the same love will, I flatter myself, now impel her to repair it in the manner which will make me most happy."

Her father kissed her forehead as she leaned across him, and Mrs. Mildmay stammered out—"Lady Persiana! my Lord!"—then looking round on the company—"Surely," she added, "this is not a time——"

"It is not, Madam," he answered, lifting her hand to his lips, "therefore, as I said before, some more *fit* opportunity we will discuss the affair."

The manner of Mrs. Mildmay betrayed what she wished to conceal, and the whole company were as perfectly acquainted with the matter in debate, as if they had witnessed the whole pleadings, and were as unanimous in anticipating

anticipating in their minds what the result would be, an idea which was far from being agreeable to Mrs. Forster and her daughter; but their pride, if not their interest, was concerned in their wishes to preserve the acquaintance, and they were become so wonderfully civil and obliging, that as Persiana would not entertain any resentment, they were treated on the same footing of intimacy as before.

In the afternoon, the Miss Wheatseys called upon Persiana. She made to these good natured girls the acknowledgments which were justly their due; they were also much caressed by Lord Normanton and Mrs. Mildmay.

A walk being proposed by them and Miss Forster, she sat out with them, but had not stepped six paces

H 4

from

from the door, when coming towards them at some distance in the street, our heroine perceived the same lady she saw the day before as the bride of Gordus, hanging upon the arm of Gordus himself.

Confused at the sight, she turned suddenly back, telling Miss Wheatley, whose arm she had hold of, she was taken very ill: she ran hastily into the house, and into the parlour, in which the rest of the party were sitting; and throwing herself into a sofa, a flood of tears came to her relief, which prevented her fainting away.

The whole company, surprised, ran to her assistance, and as the Earl passed the windows he observed the very same lady walk by, the knowledge of whom he had remarked agitated his daughter

daughter so much the preceding day: not doubting that her sudden indisposition originated from the same cause, he was less alarmed at it than he would otherwise have been, and she soon grew better.

That evening she found an opportunity of communicating this source of uneasiness to Mrs. Mildmay: and that tender and indulgent friend, perceiving her wishes *immediately* to quit a place where she would be in constant apprehension of meeting this happy bride, undertook to form a pretence for leaving it.

Accordingly the next morning Mrs. Mildmay said, that a sudden and indispensable business called her to her seat in Lincolnshire: she told Lord Normanton that she flattered herself
he

he would not at present deprive her of his daughter's company; but if he found himself uneasy in her absence, it was only coming down to his house in her neighbourhood, when she would sometimes spare her to him: she politely pressed Sir George and Lady Patterson to accompany them, as also Mrs. and Miss Forster.

The Earl, though very desirous of fixing his daughter in his own house, found himself unable to refuse Mrs. Mildmay any thing. Sir George and his lady professed themselves mortified at this sudden separation, and at not being able to accept the invitation; but promised a visit in the course of the summer. Bath was too full and too charming in the eyes of Miss Forster to be left at present for a country retreat,
and

and the Earl alone escorted Mrs. Mildmay and Persiana to Lincolnshire.

To gratify the wishes of our heroine, they made London in their way, for she longed to make the benevolent Mrs. Larkins a partaker in her good fortune, and she found her father as eager as herself to reward those who had distinguished themselves as her friends.

Great was the joy of this good woman at the communicated intelligence, and ample was the compensation of her generous and disinterested friendship. Persiana would gladly have had her with her; but perceiving a reluctance to leave her connections in town, she was fixed there in a comfortable state.

The Earl of Normanton's and Mrs. Mildmay's seats being so near each other,

other, the families were seldom separated: the matter which had been hinted at at Bath was brought upon the carpet, and discussed in an amicable manner: the lady could not but acknowledge she had wronged the gentleman, for which wrongs the gentleman demanded a reparation, which the lady appeared at first averse to give, but at length yielded to the earnest solicitations of Persiana, their mutual favourite; and the marriage of this amiable pair was soon after celebrated.

CHAPTER XXV.

Books are but formal dulness, tedious friends;
And sad amid the social band she sits
Lonely and unattentive:

—Sudden starts

Shook from the tender trance, and restless runs
To glimmering shades and sympathetic glooms,
Where the dun umbrage o'er the falling stream
Romantic, hangs; there thro' the pensive dusk
Strays, in heart-thrilling meditation lost.

THOMSON.

BLEST with the most indulgent
of parents, exalted rank, immense
riches, and a train of adorers, Lady
Persiana was an example of the insufficiency of the choicest gifts of fortune
to render their possessor happy: one
corroding

corroding grief laid at her heart, and, like the moth in the rich garment, silently preyed thereon; and the Earl and his amiable Countess had the pain to perceive, that though she endeavoured to appear chearful before them, yet that her spirits were but assumed; that she was unwillingly drawn into company, that she sought solitude, her pensiveness encreased, she grew pale and thin, and her health was evidently injured by the conflict of her mind.

To amuse and carry her out of herself, it was purposed to spend the remainder of the summer, which was now advanced, at some watering place; but she displayed such averseness to the leaving a spot which she declared was more pleasing to her than any on earth,
that

that it was given up; and as there were many noblemen's and gentlemen's seats in the vicinity, the Earl and Countess were obliged to content themselves with making frequent parties among them as chearful as possible; but saw with extreme regret, and the most heartfelt grief, that every effort to amuse and divert seemed to have a contrary effect; and that though out of complaisance to them, she, with an appearance of chearfulness, gave into their plans of amusement, yet that they did but really teize her; and that her spirits, instead of being amended, were in reality more depressed. Her pleasure seemed to consist in rambling by herself through the rich woods which surrounded the house; and tho' neither of them thought this indulgence

gence of her melancholy in solitude was likely to recover her ease of mind, yet, as it seemed to be the only thing agreeable to her, they were both too tender of her peace to object to any thing which, though but for a moment, appeared conducive to it.

One afternoon, indulging this solitary humour with a book in her hand, she rambled into a wood which had been cut through in vistas, and opened in beautiful glades; and in which, as it was a particular favourite walk, the Earl, ever solicitous for her pleasure and convenience, had several seats placed according to her taste, some in the deepest recesses and some in the more airy and elevated parts.

On one of these seats in the thickest part, surrounded with that gloom which
seemed

seemed now, from her former cheerful temper, to have become most congenial to her soul, she was placed; and her attention so fixed upon her author, that she did not perceive a man come from another part of the wood, and stand with a look of astonishment before her. At length she looked up; and on seeing the face of the person who was near her, immediately fell into a swoon.

Gordus, for it was him, with the help of some essences which he had in his pocket, soon brought her to herself, and uttered the most rapturous expressions of pleasure at having so unexpectedly found her: but with an air of anger she tore herself from his supporting arms, and was preparing in silence to leave him.

He yielded to her efforts with a sigh; but seized her hand as she was going from him—"Alas, Miss Mandeville," said he, "is *this* the reception I meet with after searching the world with the most exquisite anxiety for your welfare?"

"Searching for *me*, Sir? to what purpose?"

"Oh!" said he, "for a purpose which I thought, which I fondly flattered myself might have been conducive to your happiness—pleasing idea! but I perceive as fallacious as bewitching—the charm which held me I see dissolved, and all my hopes of happiness melted into air!"

"I do not understand this fine speech," said she, impatiently struggling to get her hand from him. "Per-
haps

haps you think yourself still on the stage."

He yielded it to her; but his expressive eyes at that moment spoke a language to her heart so irresistibly eloquent that she knew not how to leave him, but stood with agitated heart and downcast eyes before him, while he gazed eagerly on her.

At last he exclaimed—"Oh! how exquisitely charming! did I think it possible for such beauty—such elegance to be improved? and yet I now see them as much superior to what they before were, as they then excelled all I had before seen. What happy man can call that person his?—you are married I presume?"

"No, Sir."

"Not married! engaged perhaps?"

12

"Neither,

“Neither, Sir.”

His countenance brightened up to rapture. “Then I may *still* hope. Oh Miss Mandeville! when I was torn from you by the arbitrary force of a tyrannic father, though I cursed my own folly in not having disclosed to you the most ardent love that ever glowed in human bosom, and seeking to engage your promise to be mine, yet I flattered myself with not being indifferent to you.”

“I will hear no more, Sir.”

“Yet hear me. You say you are neither married nor engaged.”

“But if I am not—”

“*Who* is, my angel?”

“Insolence!—or is it artful baseness?—Would you have me believe—that *you* are not?”

“I!—

“ I!—on my life, my honour!”

“ Did I not see your bride? your Lady Elizabeth?”

“ Oh!” said he, throwing himself on his knees before her, seizing her trembling hand, and detaining it in spite of all her efforts to disengage it, “ is it to *that* idea that I owe this reception? No: you might see Lady Elizabeth, and as a *bride*, but not *mine*, for she is married to my brother.”

Persiana in vain endeavoured to hide her pleasure at this intelligence. It displayed itself in every feature, in defiance of every effort for its concealment, and her enraptured lover gazed delighted on her altered countenance, an unequivocal proof that he had not *greatly* flattered himself, when he thought her affection for him exceeded the warmth of friendship.

Yet was he much too delicate to notice by words the sweet emotion: he pressed her now unresisting hand to his lips and to his throbbing heart: he seated her, and sat himself down beside her; and at last broke the interesting silence.

He informed her of what she had imagined to have been the case, that his father had intercepted his letter to his sister, and by a very unusual strain of paternal authority had taken him home by force; but finding him immovable in his resolution not to marry the lady he had provided for him, the father agreed to drop all farther importunity on that head if his son would promise him to remain at home, which on that condition he had been induced to do; but anxious for our heroine,

heroine, he had, a few days after his forcible return, found means to send a confidential servant to D——, who returned with the mortifying intelligence that she had left that place, and could thence be traced to London, but it was impossible to discover her there.

Soon after his return, they received the melancholy intelligence that his eldest brother, the Viscount Ellwood, was killed by a fall from his horse as he was hunting at Fontainbleau; and the event being too suddenly communicated to his lady, who doated on him, she survived the dreadful accident but three days. As the late Viscount left no children, Gordus told our heroine, the mother's jointure with the title devolving to himself, he was by it enabled to live independant of

his father, and determined him, as he could now place her in a rank of life not ineligible, to search her out, and offer her his hand and fortune. He came to town on that errand; he had looked into every shop; he had walked up and down through every street; he had nightly frequented every public place; but after every enquiry, every method taken to discover her, he was obliged to give up in despair. His father had proposed many matches, none of which he would hear of; and had some time desisted from his importunities; but that his brother having been captivated by the charms of Lady Elizabeth Portman, and no objection being possible to be made to either that lady or her fortune, his father had consented, and they were united:

united : he accompanied them to Bath, where he staid but a few days, the festivity of the event ill according with the gloom with which he had been involved since he had deemed the charming Miss Mandeville lost to him : but now, he said, his features brightening into rapture, he had been induced to accept of an invitation to an uncle of Lady Elizabeth's, who lived in this vicinity, to accompany them with his father and sister to his house, where they all now were; and chance had directed his wandering steps, unacquainted with the neighbourhood, and seeking a relief in solitude for the disgust he felt in lively society, to that thrice happy place, where at last, tired of persecuting him, fortune had once more indulged his eyes with beholding her.

However

However delightful the rhapsodies of love, the thickening gloom of evening by this time warned our heroine it was time to retire: but though she departed without having had leisure to inform her lover of any part of her *own* story, she did not go without engaging to meet him the next evening on the very same spot; and she returned to the house in a very different state of mind from that in which she had left it.

As it was no unusual thing for Lady Persiana to walk late in the evening, no particular notice was taken of her doing so now; but on entering the drawing room she was rather more surprised than delighted to find Mrs. and Miss Forster, who were come to be the Countess's guests for a few days:

days: and as *her* guests, though the characters of *both* were disagreeable to her, she made her compliments to them with great politeness.

Tenderly anxious for her health, the Earl and Countess, after any little absence, always examined her countenance with solicitude: this evening they were most agreeably surprised by a visible change for the better; the roses had re-visited her cheeks, and the most lively spirits sparkled in her eyes: a glance of mutual congratulation passed between them, and the conversation of the evening was as brilliant as possible.

After supper, Miss Forster, speaking of a lady of her acquaintance, who had been much slighted by her husband because he had been disappointed of
some

some part of her fortune, Lady Persiana said, that nothing, if she was married, would render her so miserable as discovering that her *fortune* and not *herself* had been her husband's motive to desire the union.

“ And yet in all probability, Lady Persiana, that unhappiness *will* be your's, notwithstanding your beauty and accomplishments, so mercenary are the men become,” said Mrs. Forster.

This was a subject which Lord Normanton took up very warmly, both in tendernefs to his daughter, and in honour of his own sex, and it was argued with a degree of heat on both sides.

After saying a great deal on the subject: “ now I beseech you,” said
Mrs. Forster,

Mrs. Forster, "tell me, that if Lady Persiana was to chuse a husband without a shilling, how would the liberal and generous mind you profess feel on such an occasion?"

"Happy in my daughter's choice, if it rendered her so."

"I do not believe a word of the matter. All parents love to chuse partner's for their children; and all would chuse them of fortunes if they could."

"Change the word *all*, Mrs. Forster, for *most*, and I will agree with you. It is not all young people who are capable of making a proper choice, and there are but few parents but what believe all happiness comprized in wealth: but so satisfied have I reason to be with my daughter, so perfectly assured

assured that the man must deserve my esteem who could gain the love of a mind like her's, that I do declare, if she brought a young fellow in her hand whom I never saw before, and was to say, this man I chuse for my husband, but he is utterly destitute of fortune; will you receive him as your son? I have that confidence in the rectitude of her judgment, am so convinced that wealth is but a *secondary* means of happiness, I would not hesitate one moment to sanction the union."

"You hear, Lady Persiana?" said Mrs Forster.

"I do," she replied, starting as if out of a reverie, and lifting his hand to her lips; "and it is not the first experience I have had of my dear father's tender partiality and generosity:
never,

never, I hope, will my conduct prove me unworthy of it—never, thou dearest, best of men! will I take for husband a man whom you would blush to call son? It shall be the *first* motive of my choice that he be *worthy* of such a father; and never will I marry a man, Mrs. Forster, mercenary as you deem the sex, who does not give me *proof* it is *me* and not my *fortune* he seeks.”

“And how will you arrive at that proof?”

“Oh! I will contrive it in some manner, if it is only for *your* satisfaction.”

“I will bet you a thousand pounds you do not.”

“I hate betting.”

“You are afraid to venture?”

“No,

“No, on my honour; but I think large bets ridiculous. However I will bet you one hundred pounds that I do?”

“That you marry a man whom I shall be satisfied does not take you for your fortune?”

“That you, and all the world, shall own he could not possibly chuse me for my fortune. You will give me leave Sir, when I have found a man I can like, to manage matters my own way? You are so good as to say you have confidence in me.”

“Perfect confidence, my love: let me but have the felicity of seeing you happy, my dearest girl, and chuse your own method of being so.”

“Generous, best of fathers! and you, my dear Madam,” said she, addressing

dressing herself to the Countess of Normanton, "will you give me a like sanction?"

"Without hesitation, my dear girl."

Persiana kissed the hand of the Countess, and then that of her father, as she sat between them. "How happy am I," she cried, "in two such parents! Never, no never will I prove myself unworthy their confidence." They soon after separated.

Perfectly convinced of Lord Elwood's disinterested passion, Mrs. Forster's assertion that she would be chosen for her wealth had suggested a wish in the breast of our heroine to *prove* to that lady she was mistaken, and gave birth to a plan, which at first view she condemned as trifling and

puerile, but which a little latent resentment, almost unknown to herself, determined her to pursue.

Lord and Lady Normanton had the felicity of seeing their beloved daughter's spirits continue sparkling and undiminished through the succeeding day. She could not, however, be prevailed on to leave the house, or consent to receive any company; but she enlivened the party so much by her sprightly good humour, that those whom she was most solicitous to please were satisfied that no other company was requisite.

With infinite satisfaction she heard after tea, a rubber proposed by Mrs. Forster. She excused herself from making one of the party; and as soon
as

as she saw them seated, took the opportunity of keeping her assignation.

Though she had not exceeded her time, she found the impatient Lord Ellwood there before her, who tenderly chid her delay, and then entered on the subject next his heart, which was to persuade her to consent to an instant marriage, and taking a house in a distant part of the kingdom, keep it a secret from his father; as he was not willing entirely to break with him, as his brother had done, which must be the consequence of acknowledging it.

As the Miss Mandeville he imagined her, our heroine would have rejected the proposal of such a clandestine marriage with disdain; but *now* she only gently reminded him of the impropriety of taking an indigent girl, and

one of such obscure origin, that she did not even know her parents, to be the wife of a man of his rank? He answered with many lover-like compliments; and was so irresistibly eloquent, that she not only consented to a private marriage, but also, at his eager importunity, that it should be on the Monday of the next week: a short time to appoint, for this was Friday.

He now proposed to go immediately to town, take lodgings for her there till he could find a house which she might like in the country, and, as soon as the ceremony was performed, going thither.

To taking lodgings she did not object; but told him it would be impossible to go thither on the day they were

were married; for that Lord Normanton proposed giving a ball on the Monday, to which the family he was with, as well as all the company in the environs, would be invited; and she could not think of leaving Lady Persiana, his daughter, whom she now attended and who had been very kind to her, at such a time, but that she would readily accompany him the morning after: and to this Lord Ellwood, after some efforts to make her change her mind, consented, glad to have carried with so much more ease than he expected, his grand point. He was therefore to set off for London the next morning, which was Saturday, and return on the Sunday night; our heroine was, for the greater secrecy, to engage the clergyman, by

whom she was known ; the ceremony was to be performed on the Monday morning ; in the afternoon, at her earnest request, he was to appear at Lord Normanton's ball, and on the Tuesday morning they were to set off for town.

This arrangement naturally produced some conversation concerning the family she was in, and that, an enquiry, which she was astonished had not been made before, of the incidents which had passed since he saw her : but eager to secure her consent to become his wife, he had not before leisure to think about it.

She gave him her history exactly as it happened, except her discovering her father ; but said, that when her friend and patroness married Lord Normanton,

Normanton, she then became an attendant on his daughter. It was now growing late, and they separated, though with mutual reluctance.

In the evening, Persiana, with great gaiety proposed the giving a ball on Monday, as a compliment to Miss Forster, who she knew was very fond of dancing. She had but to signify her wishes, and they were instantly gratified: the Earl and Countess, delighted at her renovated spirits, were solicitous to do every thing which they thought might contribute to preserve them; the Countess was very well pleased with this compliment to her relations, of whose malevolent disposition towards her favourite she never had been fully acquainted; and the mother and daughter were not a little charmed with this

attention to please them. In the morning cards of invitation were dispatched to every family of consequence round, and every preparation made which in so short a time was possible, to give elegance to the entertainment.

PERSIANA.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Oh day! the fairest sure that ever rose
Period and end of anxious Emma's woes;
Sire of her joy, and source of her delight,
O! wing'd with pleasure take thy happy flight,
And give each future morn a tincture of thy white.

PRIOR.

ON the Saturday, Lady Persiana walked by herself to the parsonage house, no unusual thing with her, as the good clergyman and his wife were the frequent distributors of her bounty to their poor parishioners: calling the good man aside, as she had an entire confidence in his discretion, she told him her plan of gratifying a little female

PERSIANA

male vanity by being married to a man of quality, without his knowing her for any other than a lady's maid, requiring his assistance, and insisting upon his inviolable secrecy.

Mr. Morgan thought the lady rather whimsical in forming such a scheme, and saw many objections to it; but awed by her superior rank, and naturally of a timid temper, he dared not presume to make any: he knew she was of age a few weeks before, for her birth day had been celebrated by a feast to all the indigent families in the environs: he therefore promised every thing which was required of him.

Monday arrived. Lady Persiana was accustomed to walk out early. The church was but at the bottom

tom of the park, and the parsonage house close beside it. The happy bridegroom was watching her approach; he flew to meet her; and a few minutes united in the silken bands of Hymen the loveliest pair on earth. Too much engaged in the rapturous contemplation of his charming bride to attend to trivial circumstances, the name of Persiana did not strike Lord Ellwood as any thing singular, nor yet that by which the licence was signed; he knew she had been obliged to change her *real* name, and was satisfied she was right without troubling himself about it.

Anxious to return undiscovered, she was yet obliged to indulge Lord Ellwood in seeing her near home; and it was not till they almost reached the
house

house that she could prevail upon him to leave her: he then took a reluctant leave, she promising to take some opportunity of seeing him ere the ball was ended, and she returned in time for the family breakfast.

When Persiana was dressed for the evening, she went into Miss Forster's room, and chatting with her till she was dressed also, and the maid dismissed, she then asked her if she knew Lord Ellwood.

"Oh perfectly," answered she; "we saw him frequently after you left us; he is a fine young fellow, but a little too much in the pensoroso style. We visited his sister-in-law, Lady Elizabeth Gordus."

"Do you know that this Lord Ellwood is married this morning?—and
only

only think what a choice the man has made ! married to my maid."

Miss Forster screamed with astonishment. " I thought you would be surprised," added she. " As he knows not how to divulge this pretty secret to his father, yet *wishes* it to be done, you will oblige me infinitely if you will undertake it, and I will point out in what *manner*, as I think it will afford us some amusement."

" Only tell me how, and I will undertake it with all my heart."

" The whole family will be here to-day, for they are all visiting at Sir James Bond's, who is uncle to Lady Elizabeth : when the company are all met together, do you address yourself to my father, and ask him whether he is acquainted with those reasons
which

which induced Persiana to wish for a ball this evening; and then inform him it is in honour of Lord Ellwood's wedding, for whose bride I have so great an affection, being my favourite attendant, that I *insist* upon her being introduced to the company, and opening the ball, and that I wait to accompany her into the room. There will be a variety of questions, and I suppose objections; but as I know you have a proper share of spirit, do not recede an inch; but the moment you perceive any thing *like* consent, send up to me. I shall have enough to do to prepare the girl, and you must form some excuse to my father and mother when you first go down for my not assisting to receive the company, for I would not have them know a syllable of
of

of the matter till the general denouement."

"Delightful!" exclaimed Miss Forster. "How I shall be charmed to plague the old beast with the news, for he is the most despotic tyrant in his own family I ever heard of. Oh! my dear, you could not have found me another office half so agreeable. I'll top my part, never fear."

A head ach, which she hoped would soon wear off, was the reason assigned for Persiana's not appearing at first. The company dropped in; Sir James Bond's family happened to be almost the last that came; but what was the consternation of the Earl and Countess, when, on the parties being announced, they perceived Mr. Gordus and Lady Elizabeth among the visitants. They
looked

looked at each other in terror for the effect it would have on their daughter, and the Countess rose with an intention of giving her notice of this incident, when Miss Forster, eager to begin her plan of amusement, for her spirits and assurance were equal to any undertaking, bawled across the room the interrogatory concerted; and was answered by the Earl—"for your amusement, Miss Forster."

"Oh!" said she, "you are quite mistaken; for it was intended in honour of Lord Ellwood's nuptials, and in compliment to his bride."

Lord Ellwood's complexion was considerably heightened. His father looked alarmed. "What, what," said he, "young lady?—what is it you say?"

"Why,

“ Why, to be sure your Lordship knows that your son was married this morning.”

“ Not I upon my word—nor do I believe it now.”

“ I am mortified your Lordship has so bad an opinion of my veracity ; but it is true, upon my honour, that he was this morning favoured with the hand of Lady Persiana’s favourite maid.”

“ Sir ! Sir !” said Lord Welbrooke, stepping hastily up to his son, “ what is all this Sir ? Is it a jest ? or are you, with all your fine romantic notions, married as this young lady says ?”

“ I know not,” replied that young nobleman with an air of firmness and dignity, “ why the affair is published in this very singular manner : but I

scorn a falsity—I *am* married, my Lord."

"And to Lady Persiana's servant, ha?"

"And to Lady Persiana's servant, my Lord. It does not make her less charming for serving so lovely a woman as Lady Persiana."

"But it makes her less worthy to be my *daughter*, Sir!" and with an oath he declared he would never receive her as such.

"Oh! but my good Lord Welbrooke!" cried Miss Forster, enjoying the mischief her intelligence had made, "you *must* see her indeed; Lady Persiana, who is very fond of her, waits to introduce her to you and to the good company; and *insists* upon her being permitted to open the ball."

"And

“ And justly she desires it,” cried Ellwood. “ Request her Ladyship to fulfil her kind intention, Miss Forster. If she is not my father’s daughter, she is my wife, and shall never be deprived of any privilege which belongs to her rank as such. She is a wife whom I glory in: if she has not wealth, she has beauty and accomplishments; if her birth is obscure, her virtue and honour have been conspicuous: if an empire on one hand waited my acceptance, and my lovely bride on the other, my choice of her would not demand a moment’s deliberation. Do, Miss Forster, request Lady Persiana to honour the sweet girl with her countenance.”

Away flew Miss Forster.

“ Fine! very fine!—but I shall not wait for the honour of her company,”

L 2

cried

cried Lord Welbrooke, and away he was hobbling when the door opened and in swam, simply dressed in virgin white, the lovely Persiana, blushing like the morn, with palpitating heart, and almost unequal to the task she had undertaken.

Ellwood sprang to receive her. He eagerly took her hand, and exulting in her inimitable beauty, led her to his father, who gazed on her in fixed astonishment; while the Earl and Countess of Normanton sat in inconceivable surprise, not in the least comprehending what they saw, and wondering how the strange scene would end; nor was the amaze of Mrs. and Miss Forster less than their own; and the rest of the company were silently attentive.

Persiana kneeled to Lord Welbrooke to receive his blessing; who
still

still gazing in wonder on her, found it impossible to retain any resentment, but muttered something so inarticulately that nobody knew what it was.

She arose from her knees with a smile of heavenly sweetness, and with her husband in her hand approached her parents, who sat together. "You had the goodness, my Lord," said she, to her father, "to assure me that *whoever* I presented to you as my husband you would receive as your son; accept then, my Lord, in that light, this young nobleman, who by the most generous and disinterested affection has evinced himself worthy to call Lord Normanton father"

"Your father!" Ellwood cried with inconceivable surprise.

"Yes, my dearest Ellwood, "forgive the only deceit I ever practised.

You

You have not, as you imagined, wedded a girl indigent and obscure, but the only child of a man of quality."

She paused; they gazed on each other—volumes were expressed in that look. Her parents, in transport, recognized him as their son when she presented him again as her beloved Gordus; and they implored unlimited blessings on the union. If *you*, my Lord," said she, to her father, "will present me to Lord Welbrooke, I flatter myself he will pronounce a more *articulate* benediction, for I am impatient for his approbation."

That nobleman now perceiving what sort of a daughter-in-law he had acquired, was very profuse in his compliments; the only extravagance of which he was ever guilty; but he
wisely

wisely considered they *cost nothing*: he also attempted some excuses, but she respectfully stopped him. "I must not suffer you, my Lord," said she, "in the least to blame yourself; your son and I only are in fault: he could not reasonably expect others to view my merits through the same partial medium which had magnified them in his eyes, or think an unimpassioned person would deem them equivalent to the more solid advantages of wealth and birth. I, proud of his generous and disinterested passion, have taken, I fear you will think, as it has given you pain, a very foolish and eccentric method of gratifying a little female vanity, to display it to the world, and convince *this* lady, that my husband, ignorant of my *birth* and *fortune* has chosen me for *myself alone*."

Our

Our heroine had not leisure to observe whether Mrs. Forster's countenance wore a pleased or mortified air. The charming Lady Elizabeth approached with her husband to pay their devoirs; congratulations were exchanged; compliments paid all round; every thing was said, every thing was looked, that could evince general and compleat satisfaction; and the evening was concluded with the utmost festivity.

Of the fate of our happy pair, let honest Matt. Prior pronounce the prediction :

Friendship shall still their evening feasts adorn,
And blooming peace shall ever bless their morn,
Succeeding years their happy race shall run,
And age unheeded by delight come on,
While yet superior love shall mock his pow'r;
And when old Time shall turn the fated hour,
Which only can the well ty'd knot unfold,
What rests of both, one sepulchre shall hold,